

## Book Review

*Bases bíblicas de la misión: Perspectivas latinoamericanas.* Edited by C. René Padilla. Buenos Aires–Grand Rapids: Nueva Creación-Eerdmans, 1998. xi + 474 pages. Paper.

This work is the first fruit of efforts among Latin American evangelical theologians and exegetes to provide a missiological contextual reading of the entire Bible in light of the Latin American reality. The majority of the contributors are Latin American scholars from different theological traditions. There are also a few North American contributors who have worked for many years in Latin America. This insightful book was born from Latin American convictions that there are very few Latin American studies that analyze the Scriptures from a Latin American, twentieth-century perspective. The collaborative effort for the volume was forged from a series of consultations sponsored by the Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana (FTE) in conjunction with three Latin American theological centers: Centro Kairos (Buenos Aires), Centro Evangélico de Misionología Andino-Amazónica (Lima), and La Comunidad Teológica (Mexico).

The book is divided into four sections: Introduction, Foundations for the Mission in the Old Testament, Foundations for the Mission in the apocalyptic literature and the New Testament, and Thematic Studies for Mission.

The Introduction situates the hermeneutical vision of the book in light of the foundational work on contemporary missions by David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991). Bosch is instrumental in applying the hermeneutical insight of paradigms to the reading of the Bible for constructing a contemporary theology of missions. Sidney Rooy identifies the twentieth-century paradigm for missionary reflection as a growing ecumenism ("*ecumenismo creciente*," 31). His paradigm illuminates the kind of missionary vision and enterprise that offers a united front against the bifurcation of Church and world, the gospel and social service, a spiritual versus an earthly concern, present and future salvation (realized versus future eschatology), the sending versus the receiving Church, clergy versus laity, the person of Jesus Christ and his work, and the institution of the Church versus missionary societies. This ecumenical vision of the Church is against these dualisms. There is a growing consciousness among these Latin American scholars of the fallibility of their respective Church institutions in light of the ambiguous present historical situation. This is in essence an ef-



fort to develop a "*teología en conjunto*" (to borrow the U.S. Hispanic hermeneutical vision), engage in the ongoing reformation of the Church (*ecclesia semper reformanda est*), and thus do God's mission (*missio Dei*). All of the essays are written in light of this new paradigmatic vision. The authors are well informed concerning the Latin American reality as well as the most dominant postmodernist trends in North America.

All of the authors are also informed by the current Roman Catholic and Protestant exegetical enterprises carried out in Latin America, North America, and Europe. The only blind spot is that they are not well informed of the similar and important work carried out by Hispanic theologians in the United States. Noted exceptions are that Dr. Justo L. González is quoted once in the work on the book of Acts and Orlando Costas occupies relatively a prominent place in the volume.

I want to offer some comments on how this book has offered important constructive proposals for U.S. Hispanic theological work in North America. My comments will be selective and cannot do justice to the entire book.

Chapter 2 is an essay devoted to "The Mission of Israel to All Nations in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets." Edesio Sánchez Cetina offers some important proposals on how the book of Genesis connects God's missionary activity to God's creative purposes. This constructive vision points to God's integral missionary work as Creator. Since human beings were initially called to rule the world together, the equal partnership of male and female in this work is essential to God's integral mission. This integral vision situates the family and home life ("*la familia y el hogar*") at the center of God's initial call for humanity to exercise the Creator's mission (42-3). The theme of God's integral missionary call is expressed by several of the authors in rereading the Bible through Latin American eyes for today. Additionally, the theme of the centrality of the family is emphasized in several of the essays. This is a foundational resource in the essay by Mariano Avila Arteaga (chapter 4). He finds in the family the most important institution to develop an integral missionary vocation (111). *La familia* is an important fertile ground to shape our missionary vocation on behalf of the community and the world.

Several of the Old Testament studies are offered in narrative form to highlight God's integral missionary vision for the world. This reading unfolds God's stand with his pilgrim people and shows God's purpose to stand with the poor and helpless. When God's people turn inward and create a fortress, as in the case of the Tower of Babel, God makes them pilgrims to continue fulfilling his visionary purpose in the world (51-3). This integral mission is expressed also in the theme of "becoming like children" as in the case of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:14; 65). The



world of children is open to creativity and play in light of God's vision for creation. Rubem Alves' theology is pinpointed as a primary example of identifying these important Old Testament themes of a theology of play. These narrative studies support, therefore, the important U.S. Hispanic theological themes of the theology of the cross (*una teología de acompañamiento*) and festive celebration in fulfilling God's integral mission. This vision is the one that we must see things through children's eyes. The children's paradigms are different from the adult paradigms. Children are not subject to the present logic of the world. They are lead by God's festive Spirit to celebrate without pretense the gifts of the poor, women, the helpless, and the marginalized. They paint through their actions the most sublime picture of God's integral mission, as portrayed in the messianic kingdom of the eternal child (cf. Isa 11:6). It is in this light that in several instances the neoliberalism present in Latin America is criticized (137–40). This new cosmic vision converts us to an epistemological vision in which the formalism of the power structures do not dictate the rules of play.

Estéban Voth reflects on the significance of the psalms for God's integral missionary purposes. The psalms show God's people praising God's great mercy toward all nations. These songs of praise are in the Hebraic sense of the spoken word (*dabar*) an event. In the Hebraic acts of praise, the spoken word meant action, event, and power to change present situations. It is in invoking God that a new reality is also created for the community, society, and consequently for the individual in these songs of praise. It is in this light that the author criticizes the present postmodernist focus on survival in merely individualistic terms.

The New Testament studies on John, Paul, and Luke reflect similar themes of God's integral missionary vision toward the world. For example, the studies on John show God's incarnate word as a word of action in God's integral vision. The studies on Luke point to an integral vocation in light of a theology of the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit. The word of God is active and in solidarity with the poor and helpless in Paul's and Luke's missionary vision. This new paradigmatic reading for Latin American evangelical theologians entails for a social critique and praxis within the Latin American reality. The work of integral salvation is not measured by numerical growth of conversions. In fact, the work of the Spirit is congruent with the way of the cross.

The thematic section of this book offers two key essays toward an integral missionary vision in Latin America. Nancy Beford situates her integral vision in light of the Latin American reality of suffering. She promotes an active discipleship of the cross that refuses to accept the suffering of the victim or a theology of glory that ignores the suffering



of the poor. This is a significant essay that finds the ground for this missionary vision of the people of God in the vocation of the cross. In my view, this is the neuralgic point to develop a constructive integral missionary vision for Latin America. The essay by Catalina F. de Padilla brings us full circle to the unified vision of this book. Her work shows the foundational importance of the "laity" in the New Testament in unfolding God's integral vision. She echoes, in essence, the same dynamic found in the first essay of the book. God's creative purposes are grounded in the family and in the community. The importance of the laity in the work of Jesus, the book of Acts, and Peter's epistles support the integral missionary reading of God's creative acts in Genesis.

This book promises to be an important resource for theological students, missionaries, proclaimers of the Word, and professors who want to engage in a serious rereading of the Bible in light of the contemporary Latin American reality. At a personal level, I found myself making use of this book time and time again as I prepared to proclaim the Gospel at the university chapel and at local congregations during my review of the book.

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